

technical definition of sin, virtue, purity, etc., it can only be satisfied by arbitrary acts which are ascetic in character. The definitions also produce grades of goodness and merit beyond duty and right. The "religious" become a technical class, who cultivate holiness beyond what is required of simple Christians. Saints are heroes of the same development. In general, the methods of attaining to holiness and saintliness must be arbitrary and ascetic,—fasting, self-torture, loathsome acts, excessive ritual, etc.

687. Asceticism *in the* early church. It has been sufficiently shown that the Greco-Roman world, at the birth of Christ, was penetrated by ascetic ideas and streams of ascetic usage. In the postapostolic period there was a specific class of ecclesiastical ascetics. There were many different fields of origin for such a class in the different provinces.¹ Epictetus (b. 60 A.D.) had a spirit and temper which have always been recognized as closely Christian. He thought the aim should not be to endure pain and calamity with fortitude, but to suppress evil desires and to cultivate discipline. There were congregations in the earliest days of Christianity which were composed of persons who wanted to lead a purer life than was common amongst Christians. They adopted rules, as "counsels of perfection," such as renunciation of marriage and of eating meat.² The ascetic tendency got strong sway in the church in the second half of the second century, but the practices were voluntary, suggested by the religious impulses of the individual, and the leaders tried to hold the ruling tendency in reason. They held it to be absurd that self-inflicted pain could please God.³ The tendency, however,

could not be arrested. It was in the age. All the philosophies except Epicureanism, and all the sects in the mysteries, had encouraged it. The Christians had doctrines which were not hostile to it. It therefore flourished amongst them. In the second century there was a deep desire for a moral reformation, and to further it moral discipline was formulated in rules and made a system. The individual was taught to endure hardships,

¹ Harnack, *Pseudodement. Briefs de Virg*[^] 3.

² Hatch, *Griechenthum und Ckristenthitm*, 121. ⁸ Lea, *Sacer. Celib.*, 29.